



DIVISION of ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Office of the Provost and Vice President

March 23, 2021

James D. Fielder, Jr., Ph.D.
Secretary of Higher Education
Maryland Higher Education Commission
Division of Collegiate Affairs
6 N. Liberty Street, 10th Floor
Baltimore, MD 21201

RE: Opposition to Stevenson University's Proposal to Develop a Doctorate in Physical Therapy

Dear Secretary Fielder:

We have been informed by the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) that Stevenson University has applied for approval to develop a Doctorate in Physical Therapy (DPT) program. While we understand Stevenson's vision to extend its degree offerings to educate and train physical therapists, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore has significant concerns about this expansion and would like to formally object to the proposal on the basis of unreasonable program duplication that could cause harm to another institution.

Existing Physical Therapy Programs in the State of Maryland and Surrounding Geographic Locations

The physical therapy profession is composed of physical therapists as well as physical therapist assistants. Each year new graduates from both DPT and Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) programs seek employment for positions within the field of physical therapy. The State of Maryland currently has two Doctor of Physical Therapy programs, the University of Maryland Baltimore and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. In addition, the State of Maryland has eight Physical Therapist Assistant programs (Allegany college of Maryland, Baltimore City Community College, Carroll Community College, Cecil College, Chesapeake Area Consortium, Howard Community College, Montgomery College, and Wor-Wic Community College). An additional PTA program, at Frederick Community College, is currently in development and has hired a program director.

It is also important to consider that the border states of Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia currently have one, nineteen, ten, and three DPT programs, respectively. An additional two DPT programs are housed within the District of Columbia. These same states and the District of Columbia also have a total of 34 currently accredited physical therapist assistant programs. All accredited DPT and PTA programs must adhere to the standards and required elements provided by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE). Therefore, Stevenson's proposed program does not offer any unique advantages over the existing programs in the state and surrounding areas.

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) released a Physical Therapy Workforce Analysis Report in December of 2020. With the exception of three states, Maryland and the District of Columbia

combined have more licensed physical therapists (per 100,00 people) than any other state in the country. The report also described that, based on the APTA's model, projected increases in the national supply of physical therapists is outpacing the expected growth in demand for services. Taking into consideration current graduation, licensing, and attrition trends, an estimated surplus of 25, 235 physical therapists is projected by the year 2030. At the time of the report, there was insufficient data available to make reliable projections on the future supply of physical therapist assistants. In addition, the report did not take into consideration the short- or long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment.

Clinical Education/Clinical Experiences

Clinical education experiences constitute a significant requirement for all DPT programs. CAPTE standards require that the clinical education component of the DPT curriculum include a minimum of 30 weeks/1,050 hours of full-time clinical education experiences. Our program utilizes a variety of private and public clinics and hospital system-affiliated sites throughout Maryland. There is significant competition and high demand for clinical rotation sites in the state of Maryland. The demand for clinical education experiences can be attributed to the eleven physical therapy programs (9 PTA and 2 DPT) within the state as well as programs from neighboring states seeking clinical education experiences in Maryland.

This situation has led to fewer clinical education opportunities in Maryland for students enrolled in the existing state-based physical therapy programs. Limitations in clinical site availability have also been exacerbated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Adding another DPT program in the state will only serve to increase the risk of non-compliance to accreditation requirements for our existing programs, jeopardizing their long-term viability.

Our university works to maintain reasonable tuition costs and not increase the tuition burden to our DPT students. The University of Maryland Eastern Shore's DPT program attracts students from all locations within the state. An additional DPT program will likely lead to new expenses in order to effectively compete for clinical sites and DPT applicants. Passing some of this expense to students in the form of a tuition increase can be difficult to manage, especially for those with limited resources secondary to their socio-economic status. Currently, physical therapy education suffers from a lack of diversity from underrepresented communities. Tuition increases and other related program expenses may prohibit these individuals from pursuing a career in physical therapy.

In summary, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore respectfully objects to the establishment of another Doctor of Physical Therapy program in the State of Maryland at Stevenson University. We believe the information presented in this document shows that the proposed new DPT program constitutes unreasonable program duplication that would cause harm to the existing programs in the state.

Sincerely,



Nancy S. Niemi
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

